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REGENERATION NOT WROUGHT BY LIGHT.

EZEK. xxxvi. 26.—*I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.*

“IF I were as eloquent,” said one, “as the Holy Ghost, I could regenerate sinners as well as he;” implying that the whole change is wrought by light, with no power beyond save that which conveys truth to the mind. A similar theory, with some varieties, is spreading itself abroad in our country, and I intend to devote this sermon to an examination of the new doctrine; in doing which I shall be careful to use terms in their accustomed sense and with all needful explanations.

Man sustains two relations to God. He is a moral agent, that is, susceptible of obligations, and he is dependant on God for sanctifying impressions. In the former relation he is active, in the latter he is passive. These two relations are almost entirely independant of each other. That is to say, we are none the less dependant for being under obligations; and on the other hand, we are none the less bound to believe because faith is “the gift of God,” and none the less bound to love because love is “the fruit of the Spirit.” Our obligations rest on the faculties of a rational soul, unimpaired by our dependance or our temper. The only evil chargeable to our dependance is, that in some cases disinclination is not removed: but if disinclination destroys obligation, there can be no sin in the universe, and all punishment is oppression, and the slightest displeasure at the murderer of a father and mother is a prejudice. On the other hand, whether we have a disposition or only exercises, we *must* be dependant on God for holiness, and God himself cannot help it. He cannot make a creature independent of himself. He cannot create another God. And were we independent all would be lost. If God has no power and right efficiently to ensure the holiness of creatures, he cannot ensure the prosperity of the universe; he cannot ensure the continuance of heaven, and if you reach that world you are not certain of remaining there a day. He may be

disappointed of the end of all his works, and be as miserable as he is benevolent. If God cannot effectually secure my holiness, and I may not hope in him and pray to him for that, I feel for one that I must despair. I know I shall never do it myself. But in every case in which we are dependant, we are so far passive. If we are *acted upon* we are passive. We are constantly passive in receiving life, though in many of the functions of life we are active. In *receiving* that influence which causes either a right temper or right feelings, we must be passive, though in the feelings themselves we are active. This therefore must be true whether we have a disposition or only exercises. It must be true unless we are independent,—unless we create our own affections,—unless we do more than God does, who never created any part of his own mind.

By regeneration the Scriptures sometimes mean the change both in the temper and in the exercises which follow ; namely, that in which the man is active, as well as that in which he is passive ; and perhaps I may add, conviction also. Regeneration in this larger sense is certainly brought about by the instrumentality of the word. To this I refer all such passages as these : “ Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” “ Is not my word like as a fire—and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ?” But the old divines found it convenient to divide this change, (throwing out conviction,) into two parts. That change in the temper, antecedent to exercise, which is produced by the Spirit, they called regeneration ; that change which consists in the new exercises of the moral agent, or in his actual turning to God, they called conversion. I shall use both of these words in the sense they did. Conviction is the presentation of truth to the mind, by the Spirit, before regeneration. Sanctification is the continued work of the Spirit after regeneration.

It is admitted on all hands that light is necessary to conviction and conversion. In the first place, it is the instrument of carrying on that preparatory work in the understanding and conscience which shows the soul its ruin and need of a Saviour, and fits it to make a just estimate of things, and to exercise all the Christian graces, when new life comes to be infused : and in the second place, it presents all the objects towards which the mind acts in conversion. Without the word, we have no authority from the Bible to say, there would ever be a saving change on earth.

I admit also that truth is *supernaturally* conveyed to the mind in conviction. But after the most powerful convictions the enmity of the heart often rages. The question now is, *Is the subsequent change in the temper produced by the power of truth thus seen and felt, or by the immediate power of God?* I say it is produced by the immediate power of God.

The advocates of the opposite theory generally speak of truth's being employed in the form of *motives* to regenerate the soul. Now motives are for moral agents, but regeneration, in this restricted sense, is no part of the treatment of moral agents. It is an impression made upon a passive

subject, not as a reward, nor in fulfilment of any promise to the subject himself, nor in answer to his prayers, nor by his help or co-operation, but notwithstanding his strenuous opposition to the last, and in spite of his infinite guilt. Sanctification on the other hand, though an operation on a passive subject, in one respect belongs to the treatment of moral agents. It is a gracious and promised *reward* for preceding faith and prayer.

I. My first argument shall take up this subject of motives; and I lay down this broad proposition, that nothing can be a motive which does not meet a corresponding taste. An invitation to a feast is no motive to one that is full, or whose sickly taste nauseates the provisions. There must be a corresponding taste in the heart before truth can move it to love. But the question is about the production of this very taste. The cause of this must act and exhaust itself before the effect is produced,—before the temper ceases to be carnal,—before it can be influenced by truth.

If you say there is nothing in the soul but exercises, and no taste, temper, or disposition but the *stated manner* in which God calls forth those exercises, then truth can in no sense *cause* love or hatred, but is only the *object* towards which the mind, by a predisposing power, is made thus to act. Seen and felt it may be, and may produce motions of conscience and calculations of interest; but why one mind should act towards it in love, and another, equally convicted, in hatred, is not accounted for by any thing in the truth itself, but must, upon this supposition, be referred to the immediate power of God. In both cases light is equally present, and if it were a cause, ought in both cases to produce the same effect. And how is it that truth *makes* itself *beloved* by a heart that just now hated it? How can a hated object transform the hatred into love, even as an instrument? If there is nothing in the mind but exercises, all its love and hatred must be produced by the immediate power of God. There is nothing to address, nothing to work upon but mind itself,—mind without a character, without a propensity to one thing rather than another. In such a mind there is no cause of love or hatred unless you resort to the self-determining power. Observe we are accounting for the *action* of the mind, and must find a cause *previous* to the action. If there is no self-determining power and no propensity, what is there in the mind to determine it to one thing rather than another? There is no depravity,—what should make it hate the truth? there is no holy propensity,—what should make it love the truth? If God is not the immediate cause of its love and its hatred, what is? A mind with no propensity, no nature, what should make it fall in or fall out with any object, but God's immediate power? Exercise after exercise comes out without any cause in the mind for its being love rather than hatred, or hatred rather than love. If there is a cause it must be in God or in motives. But it cannot be in motives where they are neither adapted nor inadapted to the mind: but to a mind of no propensity how can they be adapted or inadapted? Consider again that we are seeking for a cause previous to the action of the mind,—a mind without propensity,—a mind, of course, which neither loves the truth nor has any disposition or tendency

to love it. To such a mind the truth no more agrees than to a mind with an opposing temper. How then can it cause love? "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" How is it in the widely extended and well known empire of taste? Why do one set of objects please rather than another? Every body will tell you, *because* they are adapted to the tastes of men. But here is no taste, and therefore nothing to which truth is adapted, and therefore truth can be no cause of love; and for the same reason it can be no cause of hatred. Now as there is no cause of love or hatred in the mind before the exercise, nor yet in the truth, nor in any outward object, the cause of both, whatever be their objects, must be found in the immediate power of God.

But there *is* a taste or temper distinct from exercise. There is a *stated propensity* to feel and act thus and thus, which does not lie merely in the stated mode of God's operation, but *belongs to the man* and makes a part of his *character*, even when the temper is not in exercise. In the provision made in our constitution for those passions which depend on the body, you see a preparation to influence the future action of the heart. As moral agency and obligation are concerned, I know not that any difference is made if the predisposing cause is lodged in the body. In the case of habit there is a predisposition contracted, founded on the law of association by which our ideas are made to succeed each other in a certain order, carrying in their train *all the operations* of the mind. I know not that any difference is made if the origin of this order lies in the head. Why are we pleased with one object rather than another? The answer from every tongue is, because it is adapted to our taste. Who can doubt that every man has a great variety of tastes, fitted to relish a still greater variety of objects in nature, in art, in science, in literature, in business, in amusements, in society? The long disputed question about a *standard* of taste turn on this, whether in the race at large there is such a similarity of constitution as fits them to relish the same objects and to be disgusted with the same. These tastes, which exist anterior to the pleasure or disgust, are certainly in the mind, and are so connected with desire, love, hatred, and other affections as their cause, that they must be referred to the heart. Allow one of this family of tastes to stand related to divine objects, and I have found what I sought. But it is hard, you say, to suppose a disposition which must be removed by the Spirit before a man can love God: it looks like a chain which binds him hand and foot and destroys obligation. But the basis of obligation, which is none other than natural ability, lies in the faculties of a rational soul, and is not impaired by an opposing temper. And as to the necessity of having the disposition changed, that only makes the man dependant on God for regeneration, the same that he is if he has nothing but exercises. It is no harder to be dependant for a disposition than for affections. Fix in your mind the entire consistency between dependance and obligation, and this difficulty will vanish. You say you cannot conceive what that temper is. But you can conceive of an appetite of the mind antecedent to desire, as easily as you can conceive of an appetite of the body antecedent to hunger. You can conceive of a tendency of

the heart to a *certain kind* of exercise, as easily as you can conceive of a heart prepared to exercise at all,—as easily as you can conceive of an intellect adapted to the acquisition of knowledge,—as easily as you can conceive of any faculty of the mind, or of the mind itself, distinct from exercise. And certainly you can conceive of this moral temper as easily as you can conceive of those tastes which predispose men to relish the beauties of nature and art. You cannot comprehend any of the operations of matter or of mind; and if you deny whatever you cannot comprehend, you will be a skeptic indeed. You cannot conceive what that temper is? What then is *talent* antecedent to the action of intellect? Tell me this and I will tell you that. And then, by the same reasoning, there is nothing in intellect but action; and that one acts more strongly than another, is not to be ascribed to any thing in the mind which we call talent, but to the immediate power of God acting in a stated way. And what is there in any faculty of the mind distinct from exercise? in imagination, memory, perception, judgment, taste? What is there in reason? What is there in mind itself? And where are we now? Like Hume we have annihilated mind, and left nothing, as Stewart says, “but impressions and ideas,”—that worst extreme in which Berkleianism exploded.

But reason as we may, the fact is before all men, that one set of motives must be addressed to one man and another to another, according to the existing temper, which is calculated upon before the exercises are excited. You say the calculation is, that a man will *act* as he *has acted*, and will be influenced by such motives as have influenced him before: that is all. No, the calculation looks beyond action or feeling to a *causal propensity* evinced by action, and which is conceived to belong to the man and to constitute his susceptibility of the impression desired. This is the common sense of mankind. You look upon a man as avaricious even when he is not thinking of his gains, as overbearing even when dissolved in grief; and would you manage him, you adapt your motives to his habitual temper, which you ascribe to him both when he sleeps and when he wakes. In matters of business and the arts and in the selection of society, we ascribe to men diversities of tastes altogether distinct from acts of judging and choosing, and which we regard as the *causes* of those acts and inherent in the character. You ascribe to the sleeping lion the nature of a lion and not of a lamb. It was the old way of thinking that every animal had a *nature* and *acted it out*; that the horse acted thus *because* it had the nature of a horse and not of a serpent; that the different natures of birds, fish, and worms were the *causes* of their different actions. But now it seems there is no cause of any distinctive animal action in the animal itself, except the mere organization of brute matter. Sin has no root in the human soul. The heart acts so because it acts so. To make depravity the reason would only be to make a thing the cause of itself. There is nothing in the fountain which causes it to send forth bitter waters rather than sweet. If you say, the task will be as great to find a cause for the depraved *temper*, I answer: the well known process of induction is the inferring of a general law from particular facts. That law, which is regarded as the *cause* of the

facts arranged under it, may be resolved into another still more general, until you come to the most general that can be discovered. And for that you can assign no other reason than that such is the will of our Creator. Now the question is, whether, when you have found that the exercises of the heart are sinful, you have come to the most general conclusion possible, or whether, from the universal and continued exercise of sin, we may not infer a sinful nature or disposition in the race, just as we infer the law of gravitation from the frequent fall of heavy bodies. And if we may, and can go back no farther, we are not to be reproached with presenting a fact without assigning a cause. If we know of no cause beyond but the First Cause of all, it is exactly what occurs in every branch of physical science. From repeatedly seeing steel filings drawn towards a magnet, we infer the general law of magnetical attraction. But if we are required to tell the cause of magnetical attraction, we can only say, Such is the will of our Creator. It is an original law of our nature to ascribe every change to a cause. The exercises of our minds involve a change, and therefore we instinctively seek for a cause; and when we have traced them to *nature*, which does not change, we look no farther, we can go no farther. This is more than common sense, it is instinct, it is an ultimate law of the human understanding.

That the belief of mankind is what I have represented it, is proved decisively from their language. How came such words in every tongue as *temper* and *disposition*, if nothing answering to them was supposed to exist? And it is still more certain from the language of Scripture, which accommodates itself to the common apprehensions of mankind. That language constantly refers to something in the mind, good or bad, which is anterior to exercise, and which gives rise to all our feelings and passions. I scarcely know how to make a selection,—it is found on every page. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, *for his seed remaineth in him* and he cannot sin.” “That which is born of the flesh is *flesh*, and that which is born of the Spirit is *spirit*.” “A new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the *stony heart* out of your flesh, and I will give you a *heart of flesh*.” “The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.” “Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.” Indeed every case of demoniacal possession, indicated a diseased state of the mind which was the *cause* of diseased action. May I not strengthen my argument by analogies drawn from the body? That has appetites distinct from the desires they occasion. The quenched eye has impediments to seeing distinct from *not seeing*, and unremovable by light.

And now what have you to oppose to these analogies, to the language of the Bible, and to the language and common sense of mankind? Nothing but a bare hypothesis, namely, that the mind has no properties, and of course no powers, but exercise;—an unsupported hypothesis, for which not a particle of proof can be adduced,—which is not a thing that admits of proof;—a mere assumption which, logically or illogically, is employed to sweep away some

of the most important doctrines of the Gospel, such as the depravity of infants and supernatural regeneration. It takes the new creation out of the hands of the Spirit and ascribes it to moral suasion, like the Pelagians of other days.

It is impossible, according to any known law of motives, that the presentation of a hated object, (hated in all its character and aspects,) should produce love. You say the object may recommend itself to the understanding and conscience, and so impress the heart. But if any thing is proved by the history of our world, it is this, that the understanding and conscience cannot control the heart. If they could, men would always do as well as they know how, knowledge would carry reformation wherever it goes, and no conscience would upbraid for present action in any world. But understanding and conscience, with all the light of eternity, will never convert a devil.

As certainly as an object is hated in all its character and aspects, it will be hated the more the more it is seen. If it is hated only under partial and mistaken views, and would be loved if seen in all its parts, the object itself, considered as a whole, is not hated. But if it is hated as a whole, it must be hated in proportion to the clearness with which it is seen. What can possibly prevent? Hatred must become greater hatred the more it is perceived. God may make the heart love the hated object, but the object itself is neither cause nor instrument of the *change*. It is the *occasion* of action of *some sort*, but not the cause or instrument of the *change from hatred to love*.

All the truths of revelation respect the character and government of God and his relations to us. The light is only *God revealed*. No such light can bring the natural heart to love the character of God. If it could, the natural heart is not totally depraved. If the more full explanations of the divine character present an object which the natural heart loves, what it hated before was not the true God, but a false image of God, and to have loved it as God would have been idolatry; and what has been called enmity against God, was only a commendable aversion to an idol. But if the carnal heart hates the *true* God, it will hate him the more the more he is seen, as surely as it is governed by motives. Light, so far from extinguishing the flame of rebellion, is only oil cast upon the fire. So it is in hell. The more God is seen the more raging is the enmity, because it is the real character of God that they hate. So it is with convicted sinners. Never was their enmity thus inflamed until they came to have clear ideas of the God of the law. I have seen them ready to gnash with their teeth but a few hours or even minutes before they began the immortal song.

The impossibility that light should produce love to God before the heart is changed by a higher influence, appears farther from the nature of the disease. That consists in supreme selfishness. In the nature of things there can be no rivals for the supreme affection but God and self. Where

God is not loved self must be supreme, and then the God of the law cannot fail to be hated, and hated in proportion as he is seen. When the sinner sees God standing over him with a drawn sword, and saying, If you do not love me better than yourself, I will dash those interests which you so dearly love, to all eternity, he must hate such a God as surely as he is governed by motives. Light cast upon the milder parts of the divine character, may bribe him into a selfish love, but nothing can make the whole character of a commanding and condemning God dear to a selfish heart. The temper must be changed to that of disinterested benevolence, before such an object can become a motive to love. The change must be completed before light can act. It cannot therefore be produced by light.

II. But notwithstanding all this evidence that light can do nothing to the carnal heart but inflame its enmity, it is still asserted that the heart is changed by the power inherent in light, inherent in it at least as a second cause. "If I were as eloquent as the Holy Ghost, I could regenerate sinners as well as he." As much as to say, "Could I lay the truth in clearly before the mind, I need do nothing more, the Holy Ghost needs do nothing more; the truth would do the rest." Whether the truth does it as a god, (for the Holy Ghost does nothing more than put the truth in,) or only as a second cause through which the God of nature works, we are not told. Give it the most favourable construction and say the latter, then regeneration, distinct from conviction, is a mere natural process.

By the course of nature in the material world we understand the action of God through second causes according to invariable laws. Whether the course of nature in the world of mind is always conducted through second causes and by invariable laws, we have not so much the means of judging; though from analogy we generally conceive the two cases to be alike. But here it is assumed that truth, when placed in clear view of the mind, will in *all* cases produce the effect without any other agent, at least without any other than that which acts through truth as a second cause. All beyond conviction then is a pure natural process.

But you say, truth is instrumental in *sanctification*, and yet the process is allowed to be supernatural. This calls for a distinct explanation of the laws by which sanctification is conducted.

In the first creation there was a set of laws established by which God could stately, and perhaps invariably, act through second causes, both in the world of matter and of mind. This is the course of nature. But the whole process of raising a world dead in trespasses and sins to the life of holiness, by the Holy Ghost procured for men by the atonement and obedience of Christ, is above nature. And yet, so far as this course belongs to the treatment of moral agents, it is conducted, for the most part at least, by fixed laws, that creatures may know on what terms they may hope to receive, and may be governed by motives. There were therefore in the second creation certain laws established by which the supernatural process

of sanctification might be carried on by instruments. Passing over those means of grace which only bring truth to the mind, such as preaching, sacraments, and dispensations of providence, I will select four laws which exclusively relate to the supernatural treatment of holy moral agents, but which are analogous to laws established for moral agents in the first creation. The first is, that both in conversion and in the progress of sanctification, holy feelings are called forth by motives addressed to a corresponding taste, and therefore by the instrumentality of truth. The second is, that faith, in proportion to the clearness of its vision, obtains, by promise, greater measures of sanctification. "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Views of God are by the Spirit made transforming, somewhat after the manner of imitation, and the medium through which the views are obtained is truth. The third is, that desires after holiness, (which always have truth for their object and guide,) are, in proportion to their strength, followed with increased sanctification, according to the promise, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." The fourth is, that prayer for the Holy Spirit; (which is always excited and directed by truth,) is, in proportion to its sincerity, followed with larger communications of the Spirit, according to the promise, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."

All these laws are for moral agents,—for *holy* moral agents,—established therefore in the new creation,—and relating of course to supernatural agency. But none of them can apply to regeneration, or the new creation itself. Here the thing done is no part of the treatment of a moral agent, but an impression upon a passive subject, not made as a reward, nor in fulfilment of any promise to the subject himself, nor in answer to his prayers; not brought about by motives, for there is no taste to which a holy motive could be addressed,—no eye to see the glory of God. It is not a case to which the laws of the new creation can be applied, for the new creation does not exist. The laws of nature were not established before the first creation, and *these* laws cannot be applied until the soul is created anew "in Christ Jesus." If light is made a second cause here, it must be according to the laws established in the first creation, that is, according to the course of nature.

That the speculations of the present day about the instrumentality of light, lead to this conclusion, is evident from facts not a few. Among others, an esteemed friend in the Gospel ministry, a man of mind, who has been perplexed by these speculations, though he has not yielded to them, lately proposed to me the following question: "May not the combined power of *conscience* and *hope*, put in operation by light, regenerate the sinner by natural laws?" The natural effects of conscience and hope he illustrated by a murderer humbled by conscience into a sense of deserving the punishment awarded, and reformed by this sense and the offer of pardon on condition of his reformation. In proportion to his conviction his enmity

to the court abates, and when the judge recommends him to mercy, it is changed into love. And if human law and pardon can do so much, cannot God's law and Gospel, working on conscience and hope, produce a still more radical change? "As to devils," he adds, "I know nothing that forbids the belief that they experience all that conscience would thus produce by light, in utter despair; hope making the only and immense difference between them and the human believer." He then asks this sweeping question: "May not the language of the Scriptures respecting the agency of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, be as compatible with this view of the process, as the biblical forms of speech respecting the acts of Providence are with the natural and invariable operations of the laws of matter and mind?"

To all this I say, (1.) That this murderer's love was only selfish; for as to any other, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." When we love God "because he first loved us," it is moral excellence that we love; and that cannot be loved but by a holy heart. That a selfish heart should be moved by kindness, is nothing new; but that it should be made *holy* by that kindness which pleases a selfish spirit, is a theory which makes holiness itself selfish. You say it is not selfishness but self-love that is addressed. But self-love is necessarily selfishness when it is supreme, as it is in every unregenerate man. (2.) The law of God comes indeed with greater authority and purity and sanctions than the laws of men. It therefore presents greater motives. But as no motives can change the carnal temper, or transform the action of the heart from hatred to love, the law and Gospel of God, no more than the law and mercies of men, can prevail without the Spirit. (3.) According to this hypothesis, the Gospel proclaimed in hell would convert every devil without the Holy Spirit. (4.) According to this construction of the *language* of Scripture, what, I ask, is the office work of the Holy Ghost, since all is done by the God of nature? and why is so much said in the Bible of the Divine Spirit, and of the *outpouring* of the Spirit, in reference to regeneration and sanctification, any more than in reference to the fruits of the earth and a thousand natural changes upon mind? The very ascription of this work to the Holy Ghost, comes in the room of a hundred arguments to prove it supernatural. The Trinity is unknown to nature,—is above nature,—is brought into use and revealed in that great work which was unneeded when the laws of nature were established, the results of which are called a new creation, the new heavens and new earth. No provision was made in nature for the Spirit to come to our world after the fall. The race were sentenced to the curse of perpetual abandonment; and without the atonement of Christ the Spirit could not come to men consistently with the honour of the law, and now comes as the reward of his obedience and in fulfilment of his covenant claims. The mission and operations of the Spirit therefore cannot belong to nature, unless the mission, atonement, and obedience of Christ belonged to nature. Now though Christ's mission, birth, and mediation were above nature, yet he adapted himself to the nature of man in his instructions, in his manner of address, in the proofs of his

mission, and therefore in his very miracles. His death itself was according to nature, though its influence on the destinies of the world was above nature. It is no evidence therefore that a thing is not above nature in its origin and power, because in its course of operation it coincides with nature. The Spirit so far adapts himself to the nature of man that he co-operates with modes of address suited to that nature : otherwise ministers and Christians, in addressing others, would have no encouragement to adopt the manner which their zeal dictates and which their judgment sees adapted to the nature of their hearers. He employs light to convince, and motives, addressed to a corresponding taste, to move the mind. All these things belonging to the treatment of moral agents, are conducted by laws analogous to those established for moral agents in the first creation. But this by no means weakens the proof that the power which he exerts in changing the *temper* of an enemy to that of a friend, not by motives addressed to a moral agent, but by an impression upon one who certainly is passive in *receiving* it, is supernatural. It was proper that the whole treatment of moral agents,—the government, the means of instruction, conviction, and persuasion,—should be adapted to their nature, under both the original constitution and the new ; but the power which gives effect to motives and persuasions by an operation on a depraved heart, belongs not to the God of nature, but to one of the Persons of the Trinity, denominated the Holy Ghost because the Author of holiness in fallen man.

If the power acted through the laws of nature it would be uniform, and a person acquainted with all the natural laws of matter and mind, and knowing those which would be brought into action in a certain case, could infallibly predict the result. Why then do persons, the most stubborn and the most exposed to temptation and the farthest removed from the means of grace, often become Christians, while others, the most favoured through life, die in their sins? And why are men, without any apparent natural cause, *suddenly* convicted and converted? And why is a whole town roused, and hundreds converted in a few weeks, by an influence whose beginning had been working for months in twenty different minds unknown to each other, and without the possibility of being traced to any natural cause?

There *are* changes in the disposition which are brought about by natural laws ; but these are all *gradually* produced, except in the single case where the change arises from a sudden affection of the body. But here is the greatest of all changes produced in an instant : for it can be proved that a man is an enemy to God *until* he loves him supremely, and therefore must leap from one state to the other in a moment.

This change is set forth in Scripture under emblems and names of things wholly supernatural ; such as a new creation, a new birth, a resurrection, the miraculous opening of eyes and ears. Allowing regeneration in these passages to be taken in its widest sense, can it be supposed that the supernatural part is confined to conviction and conversion? That these two are

supernatural I admit and maintain; but surely the change of the *temper*, so that it shall regularly send forth, at the bidding of motives, supreme love to God, where, before, the same motives called forth nothing but enmity, is much the most wonderful part of the general change. Shall this be pronounced the mere effect of light operating invariably as a second cause? This would,

III. Detract greatly from the glory of God's power in regeneration. It would make the change no more evincive of special power than restoration to health or the taming of the wildness of youth. All that the Holy Ghost does upon this supposition, is to hold truth to the conscience and heart, and when the sinner struggles to get away, to press it upon him, until the truth by its own power, (which you say is God acting steadily through that second cause,) prevails. What then is the office of the Holy Ghost in this thing, distinct from the God of nature? Between that thumb and finger I hold a candle to a wet board, and keep it there against all attempts to remove it, until the board is dried and inflamed and consumed. Does that thumb and finger represent all that the Holy Ghost does in regeneration, beyond what is done by the God of nature acting through truth? That holding of truth to the mind is only conviction. The Holy Ghost then does nothing but convict, and truth regenerates. Where then is the exhibition of mighty power? The change is spoken of as a manifestation of as great power as the first creation. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is spoken of as a manifestation of no less power than the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know—what is *the exceeding greatness of his power* to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." Now is this marvellous power confined to the mere work of conviction? Thousands are convicted, apparently as much as those who soon afterwards are subdued, and yet turn back; and no one speaks of the mighty power manifested in their case. Or is it in conversion that this wondrous power chiefly appears? But this calling forth of holy exercises by motives addressed to a taste already holy, evinces no greater power than the whole process of sanctification. But no such emphasis is laid on sanctification as indicative of mighty power. The greatness of the manifestation lies in subduing an *enemy*, and the chief point consists in breaking his *temper*.

But you say, these texts do speak of the power of God in sanctification. Then your cause is lost. For if sanctification evinces so much power, none will pretend that regeneration discovers less.

But I seem to hear you say again, It is none the less the power of God because it acts through a second cause: what is the influence of a second cause but the stated action of divine power? This is probably true of

physical or material causes, but not of such a cause as truth. Although physical causes and their essential properties must be allowed to have a real existence, or, like Berkeley, we blot out the material universe; yet, so far as man can see, they are nothing but stated antecedents, and their influence is only the stated action of divine power, and nothing intervenes between that power and the effect. All this is generally admitted by philosophers of second causes in the material world; but truth is quite a different thing, as I hope presently to show. In the mean time it is sufficient to say, that the power of God acting statedly through a second cause, is only what we see in the ordinary course of nature.

IV. But it seems utterly impossible that light should in any way be a second cause of this change, or that God should act through it as he does through a physical cause. There seems no conceivable way in which light can operate even as an instrument, but these four: first, by being the natural means of doctrinal belief and knowledge; secondly, by being the instrument of supernatural conviction, and, as a consequence, awaking natural remorse, fear, desire, and the like; thirdly, by drawing forth holy affections from a holy heart; fourthly, by calling forth from a selfish heart, enmity, and in its perverted forms and misapplications, hope, joy, love, and various other passions. Can you conceive of a fifth way in which it can act? in which it can change the natural temper? What is that way? Look at the thing on every side and tell me.

But you say, Rein me not up so close. If I cannot tell how, the Scriptures pronounce the fact, and your reasoning is only philosophy. But the Scriptures do not pronounce any fact in opposition to my theory. They sometimes speak of regeneration in the larger sense, as comprehending conversion and perhaps conviction, and then make the Gospel the instrument of the general change: To this I fully agree. But if a question is raised about the cause which changes the natural *temper*, no text of Scripture, I believe, contradicts the view which I have given. I press you then to tell me how light can possibly be a second cause, or even an instrument, of this change.

I admit however, what philosophers generally allow, that in the physical world it is impossible to comprehend how any one of two events proceeds from the other as its cause, or in another department, how the will moves the body. Nor can we any better comprehend how the First Cause produces its effects. Yet we must not, on account of this ignorance, say that any thing may be the cause of any thing. A physical cause is defined to be a *stated* antecedent, through which God acts so uniformly that from the cause we may infer the effect. Thus if we see fire falling upon powder, we may confidently expect an explosion. In supernatural operations I know not whether I ought to speak of *second causes*; but even here the course is so far regular and adapted to the known constitution of things, that we can judge what are and what are not *instruments*. Not every antecedent is an instrument, even when it is a professed harbinger of the

event. Thus Moses' rod, though purposely stretched out over the sea, was in no sense the instrument by which the waters were divided. This was done as much by the immediate power of God as though there had been no antecedent. There was no *stated* influence lodged, or apparently lodged, in the antecedent. So, though conviction by the instrumentality of truth precedes regeneration, for purposes obviously distinct from any causality in the change, we must not assign to that antecedent the power of a second cause or instrument if in no conceivable way it can act as such. We can easily apprehend the fact that light can produce belief and knowledge, can work conviction, can call forth holy exercises from a holy heart, can call forth enmity from a heart unholy; but how it can change the hostile temper, no man can tell, no man can conceive. It certainly has no perceivable tendency that way. It cannot influence the event according to any law by which second causes are known to act. In a physical cause there is to all appearance an inherent power; and God's stated mode of action is so much in a line with it, that we commonly call it the action of the second cause; and it requires a mind well disciplined by philosophy to see that the power does not reside in the stated antecedent. So when truth is brought into clear view of a mind which *God has prepared*, it acts or seems to act by its own inherent power. Nothing but the truth is seen, nothing but the truth is felt. But where is there any such apparent tendency in truth to change the carnal temper? where more than in loathed provisions to transmute the aversion to relish? Though unable to explain the action of second causes, we may very often know that an antecedent is not a second cause. You may build a fence before you sow your seed, and that erection may be a *stated* antecedent, but we know it was not the cause of the crop. The birth of the father is a stated antecedent to the birth of the son, but not a physical cause.

But you say, though, like a physical cause, truth can do nothing itself, yet God can give it energy by acting upon it as "the sword of the Spirit," or acting through it as he does through a physical cause. God act upon truth! What possible meaning can there be to such an expression? God *produces* truth by bringing to pass those facts and relations which are the subjects of it. He can produce *new* truths by giving existence to new facts and relations, and can make a proposition which was true of a subject yesterday, not true to-day, by changing that subject. But what has become truth, cannot, while continuing such, be changed in nature or form or pushed from place to place. Of physical causes God does indeed uphold the existence and properties by acting on *them*, and as their influence is only the stated exertion of his power, he acts *through* them. Not so with truth. Truth is what it is, and God can neither take from it nor add to it, but by changing the relations of *things*. The doctrines it contains, after being made true by the relations established in *things*, have in themselves, and without deriving it from any being, such a tendency to affect a given temper as they have. No being can add any thought or relation of thoughts, (without changing the relation of *things*,)—any energy or any property whatever, not found in them before. Truth, in this sense, is eternal and

immutable. God no more upholds the existence and properties of divine truth, (aside from sustaining the relations of things,) than he supports the eternal relations of mathematical verities. But it is not for him to create or destroy the truth that two and two make four. If any thing is done to carry divine truth to the mind, it must be done by an operation, not on truth, but on the mind itself. This is done even in sanctification. Where truth is really made an instrument, the power is not exerted on truth but on the mind. As it is however the truths of the word which enter the soul in conversion, the word is called "the sword of the Spirit;" but the hand which introduces it is not applied to the sword to open a passage for itself, but to the heart to remove its seven-fold plates of brass. What is it that keeps truth from the conscience and heart of a stupid sinner under the Gospel? Nothing but unbelief, arising from hatred of the truth. As then the hindrance lies in the heart and not in the truth, where but to the heart should the removing power be applied? And what saith the Scripture? Not, "I will exert my power upon truth," but, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

Nor is there any conceivable way in which God can act *through* truth, as he does through physical causes *whose influence is only the stated exertion of his power*. The power of truth is *its own*, and all that can be done besides presenting it, is to prepare the *mind* to feel and love it and act under its influence,—its *own proper* influence after the mind is thus prepared.

In this respect truth is altogether different from a second cause in nature. And it is different in another respect, which renders the application to it of the name of second cause of doubtful propriety, even when it is used as an instrument. The stated antecedents in nature are called second causes because to a superficial view they possess the whole power which produces the effect. But truth surrounds itself with no such shadow of an efficient cause. It holds out no appearance of power beyond its own. It drops indeed its own *underived* influence upon a heart which God has prepared; but, of two convicted men, it pretends not to make the difference between him that loves and him that hates itself. By a power upon the mind it is made, in conviction, conversion, and sanctification, to penetrate the soul like a sword, and seems exactly entitled to the name of *instrument*.

In short, as truth cannot change the natural temper as a second cause, and as God cannot help out its power but by acting upon the mind, (and thus really doing the work without it,) it cannot succeed in any way.

Objection I.—Upon this plan there is little encouragement to the unregenerate to put themselves in the way of the means of grace, or to the people of God to present truth before them.

Answer.—There is every encouragement that there can be on any plan. Unless there is a body of truth formed in their understanding by the word of

God, and deeply impressed upon their conscience by the convicting Spirit, they are not prepared to exercise a new heart should it be given them, and we have no authority to say that it will in any case be given them, and we know that as a general rule it will not be given them. Without instruction and conviction therefore by the truths of God, there is no reason to expect that the Spirit will ever change their hearts. And when their hearts are changed, without truth before them there are no objects towards which they can exercise their new affections. Here are reasons as pressing as upon any plan to drive sinners to the means of grace, and to persuade Christians to follow them with the sublime and awful and winning verities of the Gospel.

Objection II. But this is dwelling so much on their passiveness and so little on their obligations immediately to accept the Gospel! is contemplating them so much as mere tablets and so little as agents who are to be assailed by "the sword of the Spirit"!

Answer. I said in the outset that they are both passive and active. This question respects them in their passive relation. But, as much in one view as the other, it leaves them complete moral agents, bound by every obligation to give their hearts to God at once. As much in one view as the other, the pressure of their obligations is the direct and most powerful means to convince them of their guilt and ruin and bring them to the feet of their King. That is, while we are pressing them with their obligations and demerits, and urging them to a Saviour's arms, that is the time when the Holy Ghost is most likely to transform the rock to flesh, to quell them into submission and draw them out to Christ. All this is true, and reveals the very process whose *outward* front has given colour to that notion of instrumentality which I am opposing. All this is true, and warrants me before I stop to turn full upon the enemies of God, and say, O rebels, drop those weapons from your bloody hands. Infinite obligations press you to this. Eternal plagues await a moment's delay. Almighty love has dropped around you from the skies, and written its claims in the bloody inscriptions of Calvary. Heaven pleads as though itself were to suffer. Compassion has wept her ocean full. O sinner, drop that murderous spear that would open all his wounds afresh. Tear out that heart that, unless bribed by prosperity and hope or stupified by ignorance or unbelief, is foaming with the rage of a devil. All that is great, all that is god, all that is lovely and tender, bends to implore you. O submit, or it shall be written on the broad side of heaven and on every corner of the universe, that for that hour's refusal you deserve eternal fire. Amen.











